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SUBJECT: VIETNAM - AVIAN INFLUENZA SITUATION REPORT

REF: Hanoi 1034 and previous

11. (U) Summary: Local media reported three new cases of avian influenza (AI) in northern Vietnam this week. Although the World Health Organization (WHO) has not received official notification from the Ministry of Health (MoH) of these cases yet, WHO believes that reporting of human cases has improved. WHO country director Dr. Hans Troedsson warned that the risk of an influenza pandemic breaking out in northern Vietnam is greater than anywhere else in the world. Though Vietnam does not have a National Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan, MoH has not yet responded to WHO's offer of technical and monetary assistance to develop such a plan. The United Nation's Development Program (UNDP) is working with FAO and WHO to assist the Government of Vietnam (GVN) in coordinating donor activities and funding, using a recently released consolidated strategy. End Summary.

#### Case Statistics

12. (U) In recent days, the Vietnamese press has reported that MoH identified three new cases of AI: a 52-year-old man from northern Vinh Phuc Province, a 58-year-old man from central Thanh Hoa Province and a 46-year-old man from Hung Yen Province (a death). The individual from Vinh Phuc Province is reported to have eaten chicken that may have died from avian influenza. MoH has not reported these cases to WHO. (Note: There have been no recent reports to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) of outbreaks in poultry from any of these areas. This suggests that reporting of animal outbreaks from the provinces to the central government is not as complete as it should be. End Note.)

13. (U) Dr. Troedsson noted that MoH reporting of confirmed and suspected human cases to WHO has improved greatly in recent months. WHO and the MoH have agreed to establish two reporting systems: an official report of laboratory confirmed cases which are shared with member states; and, informal reports of suspected cases which require further investigation of contact with infected poultry and laboratory confirmation and are shared only with the WHO.

#### Briefing of the Diplomatic Community

14. (U) On May 18, Directors of UNDP, WHO and FAO in Vietnam jointly briefed the Hanoi diplomatic community on the status of AI activities in Vietnam.

15. (U) WHO's Dr. Troedsson warned diplomats that the risk of a pandemic breaking out is greater in northern Vietnam than anywhere else in the world. WHO bases this conclusion on the findings of recent WHO-sponsored meetings and consultations on AI in Southeast Asia in which experts found decreased virulence of H5N1, broader demographic spread of victims, and increased numbers and duration of clusters in northern Vietnam. The AI virus appears to be less virulent, as the case fatality rate (CFR) dropped from 100 percent in the first outbreak in 2004 to 35 percent in the most recent outbreak in 2005. The CFR fell to 18 percent in the North during the second sub-wave but did not change at all in the South during the same period. Additionally, some recent cases have been milder or even asymptomatic. Note: Although the virus seems to be killing fewer people, a less virulent virus may infect more people. End Note. The WHO also noted the virus appears to have infected a wider range of age groups. In 2004, the average age affected was approximately 17 years while in 2005, the average age affected was approximately 31 years. Finally, there are more and larger clusters of infected victims this year than in previous years. The time between the first infection in the cluster and the last is longer, which may reflect prolonged contact with contaminated conditions or human-to-human transmissions. Recent clusters have included more than family members, such as health care workers and community

residents.

16. (U) Anton Rychner, Country Representative for FAO said that MARD has not officially reported an outbreak of AI since April 2 and confirmed that FAO has not received outbreak reports among poultry stocks in the areas where the recently reported human cases occurred. The H5N1 virus continues to circulate in the Mekong Delta, where 25 percent of 10,000 samples taken from waterfowl tested positive for H5N1. Over the past few months MARD has sought to improve its responsiveness to H5N1 by: developing and implementing plans to rehabilitate the poultry sector by limiting production to bigger industrial farms and rezoning industrial farms; banning the raising of free-range waterfowl; reducing the number of places where poultry are slaughtered; strengthening AI prevention and control enforcement; enhancing veterinary services at all levels to improve detection and prevent infection; and, developing a compensation strategy. FAO noted that the GVN needs the support of the international community to enact the above policies, improve active and passive surveillance in the field, create a system to harmonize activities at the central and provincial levels, and implement countrywide control measures in the field.

#### Lack of AI National Preparedness Plan

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17. (U) Although the GVN reports that it is working on a national pandemic influenza preparedness plan, it is not clear how much progress the GVN has actually made. The MoH has not yet responded to WHO's offer of technical and monetary assistance to develop this plan. In addition to MoH and MARD, development of an effective plan will require participation of many other ministries. For example, closing schools and banning public meetings would require action by the Ministries of Education and Public Security, and it is unclear whether MoH and MARD have solicited input from other ministries. FAO and WHO feel that this issue requires attention at the highest level (Prime Minister) in order to develop an effective plan that engages all Ministries. Additionally, capacity remains especially weak at the local level where skills, funding and political reinforcement are lacking.

18. (U) MARD is conducting poultry vaccination trials in the provinces of Nam Dinh and Kien Giang with the goal of more widespread vaccination in target areas by October, 2005. In preparation for implementation of a broader vaccination program in Vietnam, FAO is consulting with MARD to develop a national vaccination strategy. However, the FAO representative cautioned that vaccination is only one part of a prevention and control strategy, emphasizing that the GVN also needs to implement bio-security measures.

19. (U) The UNDP will work with FAO and WHO to coordinate donor activities and funding to address the AI threat in Vietnam under the framework of a WHO plan released in February 2005 and updated in April. The plan outlines those activities that need funding and seeks to coordinate the donor response. According to WHO, the plan focuses primarily on the needs of MARD but lacks substantial input from the MoH. WHO identified ten key areas donors where donors also need to provide support to the GVN: improve human technical capacity (epidemiologists, lab technicians and clinicians); improve lab capacity (bio safety and the ability to analyze samples); improve communication and coordination between MoH, MARD and the international community; improve surveillance of animal and human health; develop vaccines for animals and humans; develop a national pandemic influenza response plan; conduct further research on routes of transmission of the virus; advocate public education to the at-risk populations; improve local preparedness and response to an outbreak; and improve care, treatment and case management of identified cases.

110. (SBU) The GVN may be overly optimistic in its goal to control AI by 2006-2007 and eradicate it by 2010. While much has been done, there is a consensus within the international community in Hanoi that the GVN approach is not effectively organized and Vietnam does not have the capacity yet to contain a serious outbreak or monitor fast breaking developments. FAO is concerned that the GVN has agreed to compensate poultry farmers only 50 percent of the price of culled poultry as they believe that at least 75 percent would be needed to be effective in convincing farmers to cull their infected stock. Note: The GVN compensated poultry farmers for only 15 percent last year. End Note.

111. (U) The FAO representative noted that a mid-term Consultative Group (CG) meeting of donor countries, international organizations and the GVN on June 2, would present an opportunity to discuss AI and the need for a country pandemic influenza plan. It will also give GVN leaders and the international donor community the

opportunity to discuss apparent financial needs of Vietnam  
to control AI.  
BOARDMAN